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quadrangular building of three stories, flanked by round bastions, of which but one at present remains. In the rear was the inner baillium, in which was a tennis-court and tilt-yard. The outer entrance, which is still in good preservation, consisted of a gate, defended by a portcullis; and the whole was surrounded by the bawn, in which cattle were secured during the night.

The north side was protected by the river Barrow, which supplied with water a wide ditch that extended round the other sides; and the mount on which the castle was situated being thus formed into an island, obtained the name of "Port na hinch," or the "Castle of the Island."

In 1284, the Irish princes, jealous of the encroachments of the English, attacked and burnt the castle; but it was soon afterwards repaired, and taken possession of, by De Vesey, who was then Lord Justice of Ireland.

In 1507, the Irish renewed their hostilities, and considerably injured the castle. It was afterwards fully repaired by Fitzgerald, who erected a church, with a steeple and bells, in the village, but which, in 1515, was destroyed by the Scotch army under Robert Bruce.

For the next hundred years Lea frequently changed its proprietors; and its history is but a mere catalogue of attacks, surrenders, and reprisals.

In 1553, we find it again in possession of the Fitzgeralds, the head of which family was the celebrated Earl of Kildare, who was appointed to "govern all Ireland, as all Ireland could not govern him." He, though entrusted with the government of the country, disregarded the administration of the laws, but as it contributed to his own personal influence and authority. Thus, he furnished the Castle of Lea with guns and ammunition out of the royal stores, in opposition to the express commands of his Majesty.

In 1598, the Castle of Lea was taken by the Irish chieftain O'More, who, having established a garrison, marched with a considerable force, and successfully attacked the Earl of Essex, then Chief Governor, at the pass of Ballybrittas. From the quantity of feathers taken from the gay soldiers of the English favourite, the field of action was called "The Pass of the Plumes."

On the breaking out of the rebellion of 1641, Lea was garrisoned by the rebels, but was shortly afterwards taken possession of by the loyalists, who, in commemoration of the event, planted in the market-place a young ash-tree, which during the period of its existence, (one hundred and seventy years,) attained an immense size, and was universally known as "The Tree of Lea."

Its girth by some is stated to have been 29 feet, while a manuscript which is in the possession of a gentleman in Portarlinton, mentions it to have been eleven yards, and that the shade formed by its foliage exceeded sixty feet in diameter. The tree having lost one of its principal boughs during a storm, went rapidly to decay; and the hollow trunk, having for some time served a poor woman for a cow-house and piggery, sunk, like an aged patriarch, beneath the weight of years, respected and lamented by the inhabitants of the village.

In 1642, Lea was taken by Lord Castlehaven; and in 1650, by the parliamentary forces under Colonel Hewson and Reynolds, and finally dismantled.

The last person who took up his abode at Lea was a noted horse-stealer, (Dempsey,) who converted the extensive vaults under the castle into stables, and for several years successively carried on his nefarious trade. From the dexterity he evinced in committing his depredations, he acquired the Irish name of "Shamas, a Coppuil," or "James the Horse;" and as the peasantry, especially of Ireland, are fond of "the wild and wonderful," his history furnished the subject of many an evening tale.

#### RAILROADS IN THE UNITED STATES.

From a recent file of American papers, we find that the progress of railroads in the United States is estimated as follows: In Pennsylvania, there are fifteen lines completed, and sixty-seven in contemplation; in New York there are six completed, and twenty-seven in contemplation; in the state of Ohio, twelve are in progress, but none yet brought to a perfect state of completion; in Massachusetts, there are also several in progress; and the

great railroad from Baltimore, through Maryland, to the Ohio river at Wheeling, a distance of 275 miles, is rapidly approaching to a close. Altogether there are forty-seven railroads completed, and one hundred and thirty-seven commenced, or in contemplation. Besides the great line to the western states from Baltimore to Wheeling, it appears that corresponding lines are projected from Philadelphia and New York; these being required in order to preserve an equality of advantages with Baltimore, in the trade to the great regions of the Ohio river. In the line from Philadelphia to Pittsburg, it is boldly determined upon, to tunnel through the Alleghany mountains, the circuit being otherwise so expensive, as to render that great labour the cheaper course to be pursued. It is to be observed, however, that these railroads have not the solidity, and probable strength and durability of the railroads of this country. The rails are laid down upon wood, and not upon stone, as in the Manchester and Liverpool railroad, and others which our readers may have seen. This plan has been adopted in consequence of the abundance of timber upon the lines of country through which the railroads pass, and the less quantity of labour required for preparing that material, in a country where wages are so high. It is calculated that the wood work must be renewed upon an average once in the course of seven years. Perhaps, as railroads, and indeed the whole science of locomotion, are evidently yet in infancy, this cheaper mode of proceeding may be in reality the more judicious, since less capital is thus endangered by the introduction of improved steam carriages, or other still cheaper and more advantageous locomotive power. The iron-work is all imported from Great Britain, the iron of the United States being too soft for this and other purposes where much friction is produced. For this reason, the government has very judiciously allowed railroad iron to be an exception to the Tariff regulations of the country; it being now exempt from all duty.—Altogether, the progress of the railroad system in the United States opens out a wide and extraordinary scene of speculation as to its effects upon the destinies of that great nation. Through this invention, the people of regions lying hitherto far away from all effectual control, will be brought into the solid union of the social bond; and the fear that the United States were too large for one government, will become an unremembered and visionary folly.—*Athenæum*.

#### AN IRISH OTTER.

At a recent meeting of the Zoological Society, London, Mr Ogilby called the attention of the members to a specimen of an Irish otter, taken near Newtownlimavady. On account of the intensity of its colouring, which approaches nearly to black, both on the upper and under surface; of the less extent of the pale colour beneath the throat, as compared with the common otter, (*Lutra vulgaris*, Linn.) as it exists in England; and of some difference in the size of the ears, and in the proportions of other parts, Mr. Ogilby has long considered the Irish otter as constituting a distinct species; and he feels strengthened in this view of the subject by the peculiarity of habitation and manners. It is, in fact, to a considerable extent a marine animal, being found chiefly along the coast of the county of Antrim, living in hollows and caverns formed by the scattered masses of the basaltic columns of that coast, and constantly betaking itself to the sea when alarmed or hunted. It feeds chiefly on the salmon; and as it is consequently injurious to the fishery, a premium is paid for its destruction; and there are many persons who make a profession of hunting it, earning a livelihood by the reward paid for it and by disposing of its skin. Mr. Ogilby stated his intention of comparing it minutely with the common otter as soon as he should be enabled to do so by the possession of entire subjects, and especially of attending to the comparison of the osteological structures.

#### BASALTIC COLUMNS.

A range of basaltic columns has been discovered on the south side of Cairncarny Hill, in the parish of Connor, three miles N. E. of Antrim. The columns are as regu-